

Multnomah County Code Update Project

Community Meetings
July 2025



Presentation Agenda

- Introductions
- Project Background & Timeline
- Zoning 101
- Code Organization & Issues
- Key Findings
- Next Steps
- Questions & Discussion

Introductions



County Staff Team

- Megan Gibb, Land Use Planning Director
- Kevin Cook, Principal Planner



Consulting Team (MIG)

- Matt Hastie
- Emma-Quin Smith
- Carrie Brennecke

Project Background

Project Goals

- Update and modernize the Zoning Code
- Make the code consistent with County policy priorities
 - Promote affordable housing, social equity, climate resiliency, and customer service
- Ensure housing related provisions are Clear & Objective (C&O) and comply with State legal requirements

Funded with County and State Grant Funding

Overall Process

Code Audit

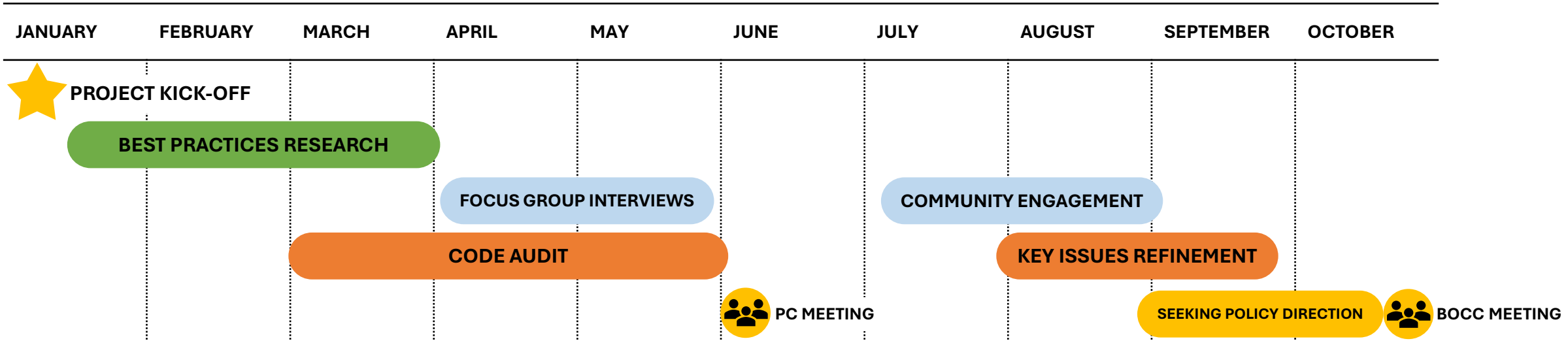
Policy Options
& Direction

Code Rewrite

Adoption

Current Project Schedule – Phases 1-2

2025



Tasks Completed to Date

- ✓ Project Kickoff and Goal-Setting
- ✓ Meeting with Current Planning Staff
- ✓ Best Practices Research
- ✓ Focus Group Meetings
- ✓ Code Audit Report
- ✓ Summary of Key Findings
- ✓ Planning Commission Briefing

Zoning 101

Zoning 101

What is a zoning code?

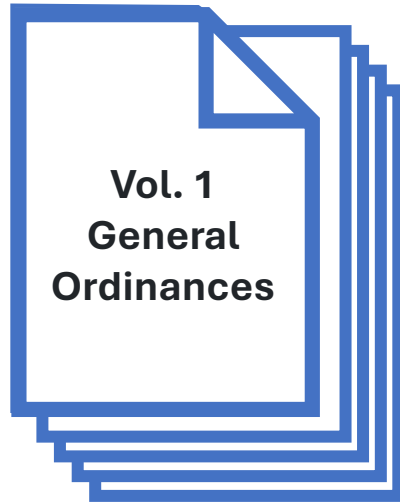
Codes are rules for how things are designed and built. They tell us:

- What types of things can be built (homes, businesses, parks, restaurants, etc.) in different parts of the County
 - How big they can be
 - How far apart
 - How they look on the outside
- How new neighborhoods can be developed
- How land is divided into smaller properties for new homes
- How roads, water and sewer lines, and other facilities are built

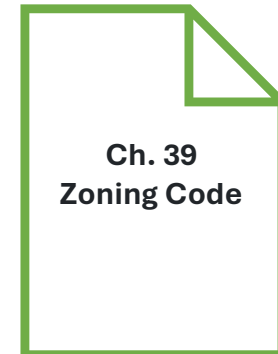
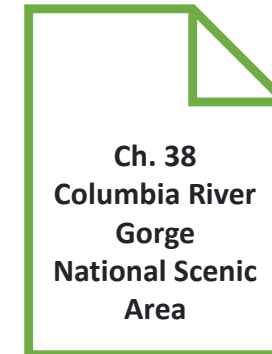
Development Code ≠ Building Code

- Building Code defines how individual building can be constructed – framing, insulation, foundations, electrical, plumbing, heating and cooling systems, etc.

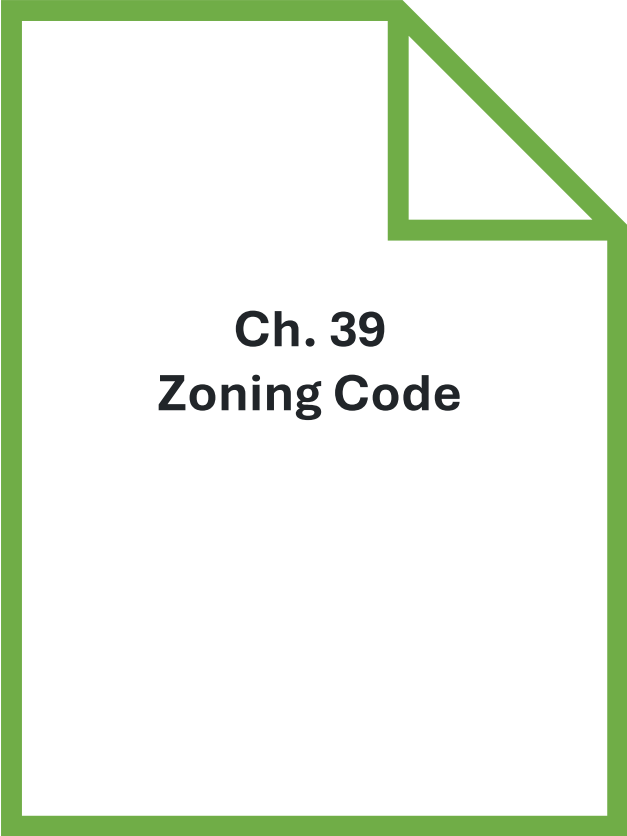
How is the Multnomah County Code Organized?



Revenue and taxation, building code, community services, etc.



How is the Multnomah County Code Organized?



Ch. 39
Zoning Code

Part 1 – Administration, Procedures, Enforcement, Permits and Fees

Part 2 – Definitions

Part 3 – General Provisions (Lot of Record)

Part 4 – Base Zones

Part 5 – Overlays

Part 6 – Common Development Standards

Part 7 – Conditional Uses and Community Service Uses

Part 8 – Specific Use Standards

Part 9 – Parcels, Lots, Property Lines and Land Divisions

Zoning 101

Why do we have zoning?

- To protect “health, safety and welfare” of all community members (basic function of local government)
- To protect the value of your property and your quality of life from what your neighbors might do with their property
- To reduce conflicts between different types of activities
- To create opportunities for different types of homes and businesses
- To provide certainty for development applicants
- To protect farm and forest land

What else should zoning do?



Zoning 101

What is a Base Zone?

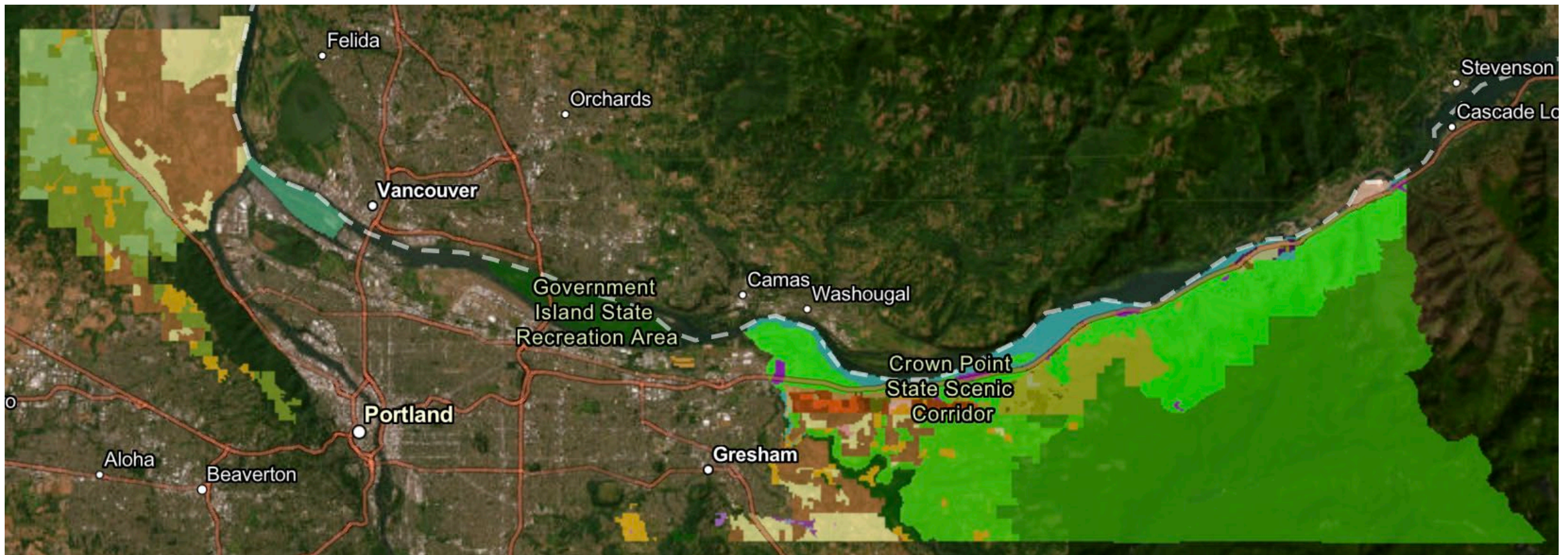
- Base Zones define the uses allowed on a property and the development standards that apply to that property
- A “use” is the type of development on the property, essentially how the property is used.
 - There are permitted uses, uses permitted under prescribed conditions, and conditional uses in Multnomah County.
- Development standards include:
 - Lot size and building height
 - Parking and access standards
 - Landscaping requirements

The requirements for each Base Zone are in Part 4 of the code.

Zoning 101

Where does the County's Zoning Code apply?

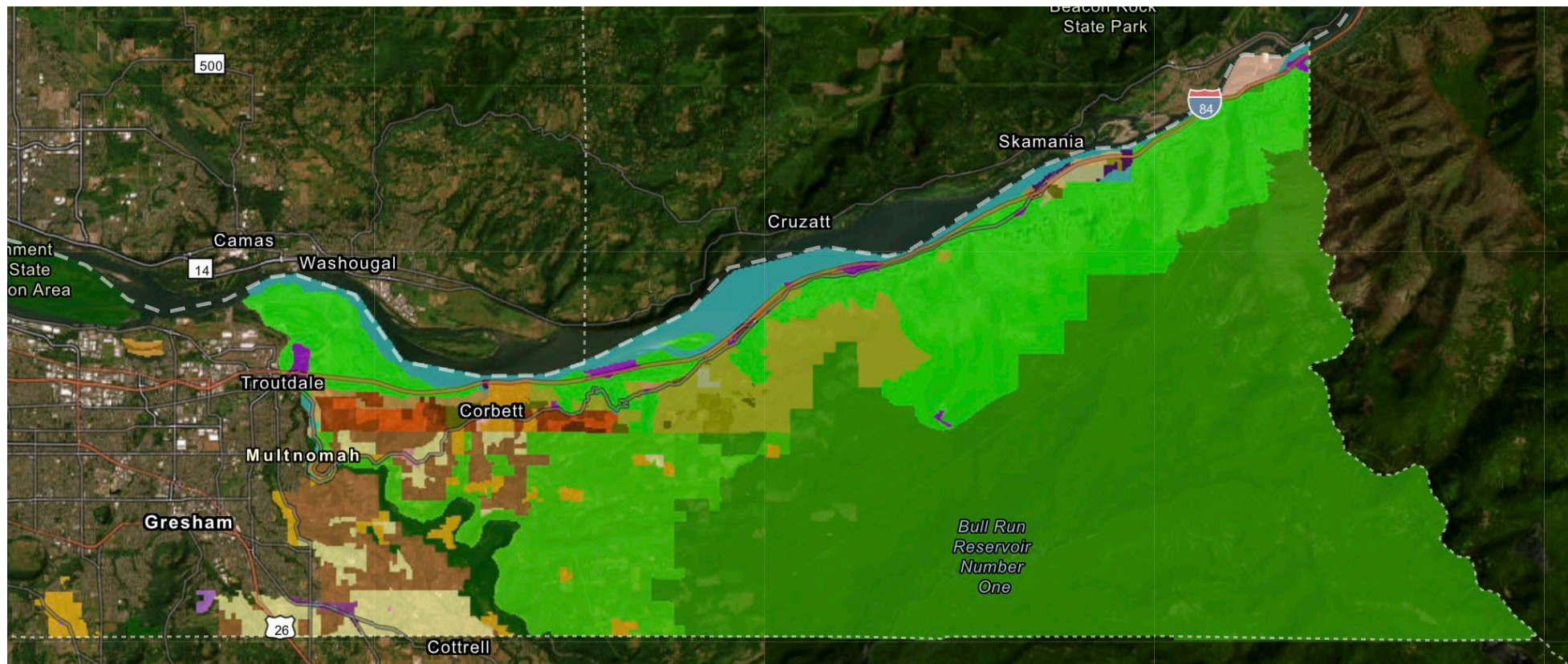
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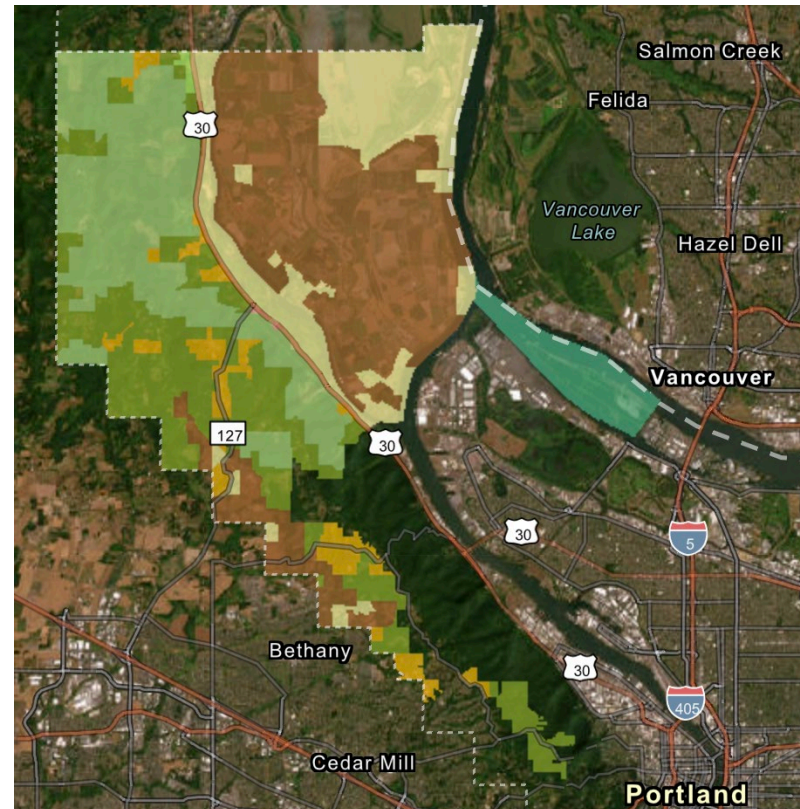
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Zoning 101

Where does the County's Zoning Code apply?

The requirements for each Base Zone are in Part 4 of the code.



Zoning 101

What are resource lands?

Resource Lands

- Resource lands are areas preserved for continued use as a commercial farm or forest.
- Counties are required to apply strict zoning to farm and forest lands that permit only uses that will sustainably coexist with the farming and forestry activities around them.
- Preserving these areas for resource use also benefits wildlife habitat conservation, recreation opportunities, and scenery.

Non-Resource Lands

- Non-resource land has low productivity for raising crops, livestock, and forest trees.
- Land made unsuitable for farming or forestry by surrounding development can be designated as an "exception area" by the county instead and developed for housing or businesses.
- These lands also may have other value as wildlife habitat, historic significance, or aggregate mining resources.

Zoning 101

What is an Overlay Zone?

Overlays are applied to areas that need extra regulations to make building, living, and working on those lands safe for people and the environment.

Some of the Overlay Zones in Multnomah County include:

- Flood & Geologic Hazards
- Historic & Heritage Preservation
- Airport Landing Field
- Significant Environmental Concern (SEC)

Overlays are regulated in Part 5 of the Code.



Zoning 101

Why have Overlay zones?

Overlays are used in part as a way for the County to fulfill the requirements of the Statewide Planning Goals 5 and 7.

Goal 5 protects and plans for natural and cultural resources that range from wildlife habitat, to historic places, and gravel mines. All resource sites in the county are assessed and significant sites are protected.

Goal 7 protects people and property from natural hazards like floods, landslides and wildfires.

Zoning 101

How does the Zoning Code affect you and others in Multnomah County?

It tells you:

- Height of buildings
- How far a building is from the street or sidewalk
- Where different types of homes and businesses can be built
- How many parking spaces are required
- Whether trees or other vegetation must be planted, including where and what type
- Design requirements for the exterior of a building, such as location and number of windows, entrances, etc.

These standards are generally located in Part 6 of the code.

Code Issues

**CODE
ORGANIZATION**

**APPLICATION
PROCEDURES**

**COMMON
DEVELOPMENT
STANDARDS**

**CONDITIONAL
USES**

**SPECIFIC USE
STANDARDS**

Key Findings & Recommendations

- Transition to 1-column format
- Simplify complex explanatory narrative
- Use more tables & graphics
- Consolidate location for Permitted Land Uses for all zones via use tables
- Simplify application review process and update process graphics
- Make discretionary language clear and objective (C&O)

Key Findings

- Make standards for the development of housing C&O
- Clarify decision process for the development of housing
- Consolidate definitions
- Update conditional use purpose and criteria
- Address high priority specific issues:
 - Lot of record verification
 - Full compliance and non-conforming uses
 - Parking & other site development requirements
 - Non-land use requirements (e.g., grading and erosion control)

Next Steps



**REFINE AMENDMENT OPTIONS
BASED ON COMMISSION &
COMMUNITY INPUT**



**BRIEF PC AND BOCC ON
RESULTS**



**EMBARK ON PHASE 3 (CODE
UPDATES) IN COORDINATION
WITH STATE-FUNDED WORK**

Questions and Discussion

- Do the issues identified to date resonate with you?
- Are there any other key issues we may have missed?
- Are there any code provisions that you are aware of that work particularly well?
- Which code issues are your highest priorities to address?

Project Contact Info

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